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ABSTRACT

During the past 2 decades, population changes have resulted in a multiethnic society in the United States with cultural diversity beyond the imaginings of the country's founders, whose initial view of the concept of Americanism, and consequently multiculturalism, included racism and slavery. Multiculturalism cannot disunite America, because the country has never been united ethnically and cross-culturally. Multiculturalism as a social movement in America has the revolutionary potential of the Civil Rights movement. The National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME) is providing courageous leadership in the effort to include multicultural content in all educational curricula in the nation's education systems. The National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education (NAFEO) has led the struggle for equity in higher education for African Americans and other ethnic minorities for a quarter of a century. NAFEO finds itself well placed to lead in the multicultural education movement, a movement that empowers the global and national reality of cultural diversity. (Contains 7 references.) (SLD)

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MULTICULTURALISM AS A BASIS

FOR

EMPOWERMENT AND SOCIETAL REFORM

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The philosophical basis of Americanization embraces cultural pluralism as a unique asset from which the projected viability of the United States (U.S.) as a multicultural nation was founded. In this view of U.S. society there is no one model American, but there is one America made up of many peoples and cultures--E (out of) Pluribus (many) Unum (one), the U.S. national motto.

National debate about multiculturalism has proliferated simultaneously with the change of immigration laws, change of U.S. demographics, and increased numbers of so-called minorities in the U.S. population since the 1970's. Multicultural education, for example, has been a target for assaults from anti-immigrationists, critics of so-called reverse discrimination, and "yellow peril" revivalists. However, it must be remembered that when "E Pluribus Unum" became the engraved American philosophy on U.S. coins, an immigration quota system against non-whites was the legislated mandate in the making of "White America".

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Multiculturalism:

A Retrospective Critique

Significantly, the original supporters and proponents of multiculturalism in this nation were European colonialists who had resettled in this land with notions of building a new culture--the New World--of selective, liberated humanity. This liberated humanity, however, was restricted to new settlers (immigrants) of European descent. Genocidal campaigns against Native Americans and the enslavement of imported Africans was the other side of the American coin in that phase of U.S. history. In other words, this coin of Americanism--E Pluribus Unum--was a humanistic contradiction in this nation's belief in and practice of both freedom and slavery at the same time, but on a selective, racist basis. Thus, the early actualization of the Americanism concept and, therefore, multiculturalism, included racism as its most vital character.

Yet, by the turn of the century, the philosopher-educator, John Dewey (1916), noted:

> No matter how loudly anyone proclaims his Americanism, if he assumes that any one racial strain, any one component culture, no matter how early settled it was in our territory, or how effective it has proven in its own land, is to furnish a pattern to which all other strains and cultures are to conform, he is a traitor to an American nationalism (205).

Ironically, Japanese immigration had then been outlawed in the U.S. for a decade, and within a year (1917) of Dewey's statement, all immigration from Asia was banned in the U.S. By 1921, the U.S. enacted the national origins (ethnic and racial) immigration quota system--population restrictions which had already been the practice for over a century. The vintage of multi-culturalism practiced in early (colonial) America up through the time of the reforms of immigration laws in 1965 was a strategic tool to empower European cultures and the ethnocentric notion that America (the U.S.) was to be maintained as a white majority nation and to insure that all other people and diverse ethnic groups would be restricted to the status of minority subcultures.

The Contemporary Multicultural Challenge:

It has been observed (Myers, 1993) that "as immigration has been a historically dynamic force in building the national profile in the United States (U.S.), change has been and continues to be an ongoing challenge to the American creed" (p. xv). During the past two decades in particular, the increased population changes in the U.S. has resulted in a complex multi-ethnic, human rainbow and societal chemistry of so-called Third World people who necessarily impact every institutional aspect of our racially and culturally diverse society--the

of our racially and culturally diverse society--the labor market and workplace environment; health, social, and mental health services; the business sector; and education systems.

Contrary to Schlesinger's (1992) fears that multiculturalism will disunite America, the fact is, America was never inter-ethnically and cross-culturally united in the first place, as the above historical observations point out. The federation of the United States into a unified, national government under discriminatory, unjust laws was hardly a guarantee for equitable, united peoplehood and rights of citizenship. Further, States' rights laws, for example, historically disunited the American people. In fact, immigration practices before mid-1965 even disunited favored Northern Europeans from disfavored Southern Europeans in entering into the socio-cultural fabric of this nation.

The reality is that population increases of Third World people in the U.S. since the 1970's have sparked vitriolic debates that speak to multiculturalism as a threatening basis for empowerment of African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Asian Americans. Apparently, Native Americans are not perceived as threats, given their population size and traditional resistance to integration. It is no wonder that multicultural education

appears to be the most pointed target of the cultural diversity critiques since "knowledge is power" is a universally accepted truism, and educational institutions are the controlling arenas for the distribution of knowledge, and therefore, potential reform of society-at-large. Multicultural education, as a social movement in America, has the revolutionary potential reminiscent of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950's and 1960's in terms of formidable combat against racism. Consequently, intercultural and interracial alliances characteristic of multicultural education efforts have rallied a clarion call for the preservation of the Eurocentric or White American culture, at all costs; and the multiculturalists are perceived as enemy troops on the battlefield of indoctrination as if this is an issue of psychological warfare rather than a means for strengthening mutual appreciation for cultural diversity in our multi-racial society. Such education, then, is a basis for empowerment, just as the liberal arts education is designed to develop liberal minds about the multicultural world in which we live.

Multicultural Education

A commendable development in the 1990's has been the emergence of an organization in the forefront of the multicultural education movement--the National

Association for Multicultural Education (NAME), an interdisciplinary, intercultural alliance of educators whose goals are:

1. To promote respect and appreciation for cultural diversity.
2. To promote an understanding of the unique and diverse cultural, racial and ethnic heritage of the United States.
3. To promote the development of culturally responsible and responsive curricula and practices that create equity and inclusiveness throughout society.
4. To provide a knowledge base to inform multicultural practices in schools and society, and facilitate the ability of individuals and institutions to function effectively in a pluralistic society.
5. To reduce racism and discrimination by providing thoughtful analysis of cultural pluralism in American society.

In many ways the NAME organization is providing courageous leadership for the revolution in the academic community which is committed to universal inclusion of multicultural content in all educational curricula throughout this nation's educational systems. Curricular

reform is the focus in schools, colleges, and universities nation-wide. According to the 1990 U.S. Census, Adams and Welsch (1993) note that in 25 of our largest school districts, students of color are predominate and will amount to 46% of the nation's school-age population by the year 2020 (p. 60). In California alone, by 2000, 52% of students will be ethnic minorities (p. 59). Consequently, the University of California at Berkeley and Stanford University are responsively reforming their core curriculum (Gaudiani, 1994).

Conclusion

The National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education (NAFEO) has led the struggle for equity in higher education for African Americans and other ethnic minorities for a quarter of a century. Thus, NAFEO leadership and membership of 117 historically Black colleges and universities have prepared the NAFEO membership for leadership, as well, in the multicultural education movement in America. For example, both Howard University and the University of the District of Columbia (UDC) have international student populations that top most comparative enrollments in the nation's other colleges and universities. This provides for intercultural experiences reflective of our global, multicultural world and necessarily confronts the relevance of curricular content.

As I have noted in the book, **Challenges Of A Changing America** (Myers, 1993),

> Just as a diversified financial investment portfolio is the counsel of economic experts, we must recognize America's cultural diversity as an inheritance of democracy's magnetism...as heir to an incalculable fortune of human resources....(p. 220).

Multiculturalism is a principle that simply gives empowerment to this global and national reality.

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